Home

A NOVEL

By GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

SYNOPSIS.

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Alan Wayne is sent away from Red Hill, his home, by his uncle, J. Y., as a moral failure. Clem runs after him in a tangle of short skirts to bid him good-by. Captain Wayne tells Alan of the failing of the Waynes. Clem drinks Alan's health on his birthday. Judge Healey defends Alan in his business with his employers. Alan and Alix meet at sea, homeward bound, and start a flirtation. At home, Nance Sterling asks Alan to go away from Alix. Alix is taken to task by Gerry, her husband, for her conduct with Alan and defies him. Gerry, as he thinks, sees Alix and Alan eloping, drops everything, and goes to Pernambuco. Alix leaves Alan on the train and goes home. Gerry leaves Pernambuco and goes to Piranhas. On a canoe trip he meets a native girl. The judge fails to trace Gerry. A baby is born to Alix. The native girl takes Gerry to her home, and shows him the ruined plantation she is mistress of. Gerry marries her. At Maple house Collingeford tells how he met Alan—"Ten Per Cent Wayne"—building a bridge in Africa. Collingeford meets Alix and her baby and he gives her encouragement about Gerry. Alan comes back to town but does not go home. He makes several calls in the city. Gerry begins to improve Margarita's plantation and builds an irrigating ditch.

Suppose you asked a man for a job you needed desperately—to keep from starving. Suppose that man gave you a frightful beating, out of pure cussedness—and afterward gave you work. Would you watch your chance to get even, or would you save his life when opportunity offered?

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

Gerry started opening the sluice gates, the lowest first. The water gurgled out into the main trench and from there was distributed. At first the thirsty soil swallowed it greedily but gradually the rills stretched farther and farther down into the valley. Under the blazing sun they looked like streams of molten silver and gold.

Margarita came running up to them from the house. Gerry put his arm around her and made her face the valley. Then he looked at the girl and smiled. She smiled back at him but trouble was still in her eyes.

Gerry left her to start on the work of fitting the ponderous sluice-gate of hewn logs that he had prepared for the mouth of the great ditch. It was a triumph of ingenuity. He never could have evolved it without the aid of a giant ironwood wormscrew taken from the wreck of a cotton press. The screw was so heavy that he and Bonifacio could hardly carry it.

At the end of three days the great gate was installed. He and Bonifacio toiled like sailors at a capstan. They drove the heavy barrier down into the sand with a last turn of the screw and shut out the river. Margarita came and saw and was pleased.

Under the broad dome of a mango tree on the banks of an unnamed African river Alan Wayne had pitched his camp. The Selwyn tent and the projecting veranda fly were faded and stained. The bobbinet mosquito curtains were creamed with age and service. Two camp chairs and a collapsible table, battered but strong, were placed before the tent. Over one of the chairs hung a towel. On the ground squatted a take-down bath tub, half filled with water. In the deep shadow of the tree the pale green rot-proof canvas of the tent, the fly, the chairs and bathtub, gleamed almost white.

On the farther side of the great trunk of the tree was the master's kitchen, three stones and a half-circle of forked sticks driven into the ground. On the sticks hung a few pots and pans, a saddle of buck, bits of fat and a disreputable looking coffee-bag. Between the stones was a bed of coals. Before them crouched a red-fezzed Zanzibari.

From under a second tree, fifty yards away, came the dull, rhythmic pounding of wooden pestles in wooden mortars. The eye could just distinguish the glistening naked torsos of three blacks in motion. They were singing a barbarous chantey. At the pauses their arms went up and the pestles came down together with a thud. The blacks were pounding the kafir corn for the men's evening meal.

Down the river and almost out of sight a black, spidery construction reached out over the water—Alan's latest bridge. Men swarmed on it.

Six o'clock and there came the trill of a whistle. Suddenly the bridge was cleared. A babble of voices arose. There was a crackling of twigs, a shuffling of feet, here and there a high, excited cry, and then the men poured into camp. A din of talk, held in check for hours, arose. Glistening black bodies danced to jerky, fantastic steps. Songs, shouts and impatient cries to the cooks swelled the medley of sound. Through the camp stole the acrid odor of toiling Africa.

Behind the men marched the foreman, McDougal; behind him came Alan. At sight of him the Zanzibari sprang into action. He poured a tin of hot water into the bath tub and laid out an old flannel suit. Beside the suit he placed clean underwear, fresh socks and, on the ground, a pair of slippers.

Alan stripped, bathed and dressed. The Zanzibari handed him a cup of hot tea. By the time the tea was drunk the table was freshly laid and Alan sat down to a steaming bowl of broth, and dinner.

After dinner McDougal joined him for a smoke. For a full half hour they sat wordless. Darkness fell and brought out the lights of their fitfully glowing pipes. From the men's camp came a subdued chatter. The men were feeding. As they finished they lit fires—a fire for every little group. The smell of the wood fires triumphed over every other odor.

McDougal had met Alan first in a bare room at an African seaport. The room was furnished with a chair and a table. At the table sat Alan, busy with final estimates and plans for supplies for his little army. The interview was short. McDougal had asked for a job and Alan had answered, "Get out." McDougal had repeated his request and the rest of the story he told the next morning before the resident magistrate in the chair and Alan in the dock.

"Aweel, your honor, it was this way: I went into Mr. Wayne's office and asked him for worruk and he said, 'Get out.' I asked him again and he said, 'I'll give you two to get out—One—Two,' and with that he cooms on to the table and flying through the air. I had joost considered that it was best I should let him hit me first aince that I might break him with justice when he struck me face with both fists, and his knee in the pit of me stummick. And that's all, your honor, savin' the Kafir that I woke up to find watering me and a rose bush, turrn by turrn aboot."

"I suppose," said the magistrate, covering his twitching mouth with his hand, "that was the Kafir I signed a hospital pass for last night."

"It may weel be," replied McDougal dreamily. "It may weel be."

"Well, McDougal, I think this is a matter that can be settled out of court—"

McDougal held up a vast hand in interruption. "Begging your pardon, your honor, there'll be nae settling of this matter out of coort between Mr. Wayne and mysel'. Aince is enough."

Justice and the prisoner in the dock surrendered to laughter. McDougal stood grave and unperturbed.

"What I meant," said the magistrate when he recovered, "is that Mr. Wayne will probably give you a job and call it all square."

"That's it," said Alan.

"I asked Mr. Wayne for worruk and if it's worruk he is giving me I'll nae be denying it is a fair answer," replied McDougal, and forthwith became Ten Percent Wayne's gang boss and understudy in the art of driving men with both fists and a knee.

McDougal knocked out his third pipe. "The de'il of a country is this," he said; "in the seas of it a life-preserver holds you up handy for sharks and in the rivers does swimming save your life? Nae. It gives you a meal to the crocs."

They had lost a black that day. He had slipped from the bridge into the water. He had started to swim to shore and then suddenly disappeared in a swirl.

Conversationally, McDougal limited himself to a sentence a day in which he summed up the one event that had struck him as worthy of notice. Having delivered himself of his observation for the night he lit his pipe once more and relapsed into silence.

McDougal's was a companionable silence. Alan could feel him sitting there in the dark, raw-boned and dour but ready at the word of command.

It was after eight when Alan called for a light and drew from a worn letter case the correspondence that a runner from the coast had brought in that day. He glanced over official communications, blue prints and business letters and stuffed them back into the leather case. One fat letter, notepaper size, remained.

"McDougal," said Alan, "hush up the camp—tell 'em it's nine o'clock."

McDougal arose and picking up a big stick strode over towards the men. The stick was so big that he had never had to use it. At the mere sight of it the men desisted from clamor, dance and horse-play.

Alan drew the fat letter from its envelope and for the second time read.

Dear Alan: As you see, this is from New York. We came down yesterday. All summer I have been watching for my second self because I'm just about grown up now—outside, I mean—inside is different somehow—and three days before we left I really caught her looking at me while I was sitting on the old stone bench down by the pond.

I jumped up and ran after her all the way down Long Lane and up the Low Road to where the red cow broke her leg that time and there I lost her. I didn't find her again and had to come away without her and now I feel so queer—sort of half-y, just like you.

Somehow I can't blame her. She didn't want to leave the Hill in the gorgeous month so she just stayed behind. Do you remember—

This is the gorgeous month when leafy fires
Mount to the gods in myriad summer pyres . . . ?

A few hours ago when I was doing my mile on the avenue I almost got run down and Mam'selle gave me an awful scolding for being so absent-minded. It was a true word. I was just that—absent-minded—because my mind was off chasing that other half. And then I came back and there I was on the avenue with people staring at me more than they ever have before. I suppose it was because I was out of breath with chasing in my mind. Good-by, Alan. CLEM.

Alan sat in the circle of light from the hanging lamp and stared into the darkness. From the river came the sound of sucking mud, then a heavy tread. A monster hippo blundered through the bushes in search of food. On the other side of the tree trunk the Zanzibari was snoring. The fires were burning out at the men's camp. Once more the odor of their bodies hung in the air.

Alan arose and dragged his chair to the outer edge of the mango tree. He sat down and with hands locked and elbows on knees gave himself up to memory. He forgot the sounds and smells of Africa, the black-green of overhanging leaves, the black shadows of the swirling river, the black-bronze of the men about him. For an hour he tore himself away from the black world to wander over the beloved hills in New England where summer dies in a burst of light.

Red Hill, crowned with mountain-ash, called to his spirit as a torch in the night to a lost wanderer. The thirty months that had passed since last he saw its budding promise were swept away. He imagined those very budding leaves at the end of their course, the pale amber of the elms, the deep note of the steadfast firs, the flaunting fire of the brave maples.

Maple House arose before him, its lawn carpeted with dry leaves. From the leaves floated an incense, dusty, pungent. The cool shadows of the great, rambling house beckoned to him. Here is peace, here is rest, they seemed to cry. The memory of home gripped him, held him and soothed him. His head nodded and he slept only to awake with a start, for he had dreamed that he had lost the way back forever.

Gerry turned to his work of tilling the soil. He cut the best of the cane and Bonifacio planted the joints at a slant with knowing hand. He sorted the bolls of cotton. The women studied the fiber and when it was long, silky and tough they picked out the seeds with care and hoarded them, for their time was not yet. One duty urged another. The days passed rapidly.

One morning Gerry looked up from his labor to find a mounted figure just behind him. An elderly man of florid face sat a restive stallion of Arab strain. The stranger's note was opulence. From his Panama hat, thin and light as paper, to his silver spurs and the silver-mounted harness of his horse, wealth marked him. He was dressed in white linen and his flaring, glossy riding-boots of embroidered Russian leather stood out from the white clothes and the whiter sheep's fleece that served as saddle cloth, with telling effect. In his hands was a silver-mounted rawhide quirt. His face was grave, his eyes blue and kindly. As Gerry looked at him he spoke, "I'm Lieber from up the river."

Gerry started at the familiar English and frowned. At the frown the stranger's eyes shifted. "I didn't come down here to bother you," he went on hastily. One of my men told me about the green grass and I couldn't keep away. I've got cattle and horses up my way and they're dying—starving. I came down to make a deal. I've picked out a hundred and twenty head with blood in 'em—horses and cattle. If you'll take 'em and feed 'em through to the rains I'll give you ten out of the hundred. Some are too far gone to save, I'm afraid."

Gerry looked at his tiny plantations which showed up meanly in the great expanse of waste pasture. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I'm afraid I can't. You see, I can't afford to fence."

Lieber looked around and nodded: "That's all right," he said, "I've got a lot of old wire that's no use to me and a lot of loafers to tear it down and put it up. I'll fence as much pasture as you say and throw in the fencing on the deal."

"That's mighty fair," said Gerry; "I'll take you." He dropped his hoe. "Won't you come down to the house and have a bite to eat?" He turned and Lieber started to follow. "By the way," said Gerry over his shoulder, "you're not a German, are you?"

Lieber stopped his horse. His eyes wavered. "No," he said shortly, "I'm not. I'm an American. After all, I don't think I ought to waste any time. Hours tell with starving stock. I'll just get back in a hurry, if you don't mind. My men and the wire will be here just that much sooner."

Gerry frowned again but this time at himself. He felt that he had stepped on another man's corns while defending his own. "All right, Mr. Lieber," he said. "The sooner the better. I'll do all I can to help."

The next morning the men came accompanied by oxcarts loaded with fencing, posts and all. Lieber was with them. He sat his horse through the hot hours and drove his men steadily. Gerry threw himself into the work as foreman. The fence grew with amazing rapidity. From the bridge they carried it in a straight line past the house to the river. It cut off a vast triangle whose two other sides were held by the ditch and the river. By night the work was almost done. Gerry was tired and happy, but he sighed. How many weeks of toil would not he and Bonifacio have had to put in to accomplish that fence!

Lieber stayed the night with them and Gerry studied and imitated the older man's impersonality. Lieber kept his eyes on his plate or in the vague distance while the women attended them and as soon as the business of eating was over he retired to the room that had been allotted to him.

He was up early in the morning and away to meet the coming herd. First came the horses, neighing and quickening their weak trot at the smell of grass. Far away and like a distorted echo sounded the lowing of the slower cattle. The little herd of Fazenda Flores caught the moaning cry and lifted lazy heads. One or two lowed back.

The horses were rounded up at the bridge to await the cattle. They stretched thin necks toward the calling grass and moved restlessly about with quick turns of eager heads and low impatient whinnies. Lieber sat his stable-fed stallion stolidly, but his eyes grew moist as he looked over the bony lot of horses. "They must wait for the cattle," he said to Gerry. "A fair start and no favor. Gad, if you could have seen them three months ago!"

The cattle came up in a rapid shamble that carried them slowly for they were staggering in short, quick steps. Their heads hung almost to the ground. They had no shame. They moaned pitifully—continually.

Gerry opened the wire gap. The horses gave an anticipatory whirl and then dashed through. They forgot their weakness. They galloped down the slope, spurning beneath their feet the food they had longed for. They did not stop till they reached the rich bottoms. Lieber smiled affectionately. "There's spirit for you," he said.

The cattle followed but the men had to beat the first through away from the gap. They had stopped to eat and had blocked the way. At last they were all in and the gap closed. One or two stood with straddled feet and continued to low, their lips just brushing the lush grass. "Poor beasts," said Lieber, the smile gone from his face, "they are too weak to eat."

He and Gerry went back to the house for breakfast. The herders sat and smoked. They had had coffee; it would see them through half the day. Before Lieber left, the horses were herded once more and with much trouble driven out upon the desert. Lieber turned to Gerry. "Don't let them back in until tomorrow, please," he said. "If you do, they'll founder."

"What about the cattle?" asked Gerry.

"The cattle are all right. They haven't enough spirit left to kill themselves eating. They'll begin lying down pretty soon. Good-by, and remember, you'll get a warm welcome up at Lieber's whenever you feel like riding over."

"Thanks," said Gerry. "Good-by."

He watched Lieber ride away with a feeling of changes impending. Fazenda Flores, his isolated refuge, was beginning to link itself to a world. Man, like a vine, has tendrils. To climb he must reach them out and cling.

The reward of those long months of preparation was at hand. Once every spade thrust had seemed but the precursor to barren effort. Now every stroke of the hoe seemed to bring forth a fresh green leaf. Life fell into an entrancing monotone. It became an endless chain that forged its own links and lengthened out into an endless perspective. Days passed. The arrival of Lieber's foreman to see how the stock was progressing was an event. He brought with him an old saddle and bridle—a gift from Lieber to Gerry. "He says," the foreman remarked with a leer, on making the presentation, "you can ride anything you can catch."

Gerry felt the foreman needed putting in place. He went into the house and reappeared carrying something in his hat. He climbed the fence and called. The horses raised their heads and looked. Some were lazy after watering but the others trotted over toward him. They stopped a few yards off and scrutinized him as though to divine his intentions. Then they approached cautiously, with tense legs, ready to whirl and bolt. A greedy colt refused to play the game of fear to a finish. He strode forward and was rewarded with a large lump of sugar. The sugar was coarse and black, first cousin to virgin molasses, but it was redolent. The horses crowded around Gerry. They pawed at him. He had to beat them back. They made a bold assault on the empty but odorous hat. Gerry laughed and cleared the fence to get away from them. "I think your master must be mistaken," he said with a smile to the foreman. "Some of these colts can never have been backed."

The foreman looked his admiration. He began to take Gerry seriously; it was man to man now. He pointed out the horses that were broken to saddle and named their gaits and mettle. Then his shrewd eyes looked around for further details to add to his report to his master. He noted that a few, a very few, of the cattle were still lying down when they should have been on their feet and eating. These were herded into a corner of their own and old Bonifacio was tending them. Beside each was a pile of fresh cut grass. As they ate they nosed it away, but Bonifacio made the rounds and with his foot pushed back the fodder, keeping it in easy reach.

The foreman's eyes caught on two new-born calves. They had been taken from their weak mothers and were in a rough pen by themselves. The foreman did not have to count the stock to see that none was missing. He was cattle bred. A gap in the herd or the bunch of horses would have flown at the seventh sense of the stockman the moment he laid eyes on the field. Instead there were these two calves. "Master," he said to Gerry, "you have made up your mind not to lose a head. You would save even these little ones, born before their time!"

Gerry nodded gravely. He had worked hard to save all. He winced at the mere thought of death at Fazenda Flores even down to these least weaklings. He himself had fed them patiently from a warm bottle. In trouble and valuable time they had cost him an acre of cotton. But an acre of cotton was a small price to pay for life.

A grip of the hand and the foreman was off in a cloud of dust. At the bridge he pulled his horse down to the shambling fox trot that spares beast and man but eats steadily into a long journey. A bearer of good tidings rides slowly.

Gerry turned to his work but a cry from the house arrested him. He dropped his field tools and ran to the house. Dona Maria glanced at him, clawed and hustled him out of the room—out of the house. The door slammed behind him. He heard the great bar drop. He was locked out.

Gerry paced angrily up and down the veranda. Calm came back to him. He saw that he had been a fool. He stopped and sat down on the steps of the veranda. Here, before he had made his benches, she had often sat beside him, caressed him, sung to him. How cold he had been. How little he had done for her. He remembered that as she had worked on baby clothes she had said she wished she had some blue ribbon. They had all laughed at her, but she had nodded her girl's head gravely and said, "Yes, I wish I had some blue ribbon—a little roll of blue ribbon." What a brute he had been to laugh!

When a man gets into trouble because of a woman, he is in real trouble. How will Gerry rid himself of this entanglement with little Margarita? What would any upright man do? Read the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wanted Market Price for Votes.

A corpulent negro woman came into the office of Judge George I. Griffith of Kansas City, Kan., one morning and inquired for the "jedge." "What can I do for you?" asked the judge. "Is yoh runnin' foh jedge again?" she asked. "Yes, I'm trying to get the nomination," the judge replied. "What's the 'sideration foh votes dis yeah?" "What!" almost yelled the judge, beginning to understand the drift of the conversation. "Ah means," explained the negress, "is votes wuth one dollah er two dollahs dis 'lection?" "Are you aware that it is a serious offense for a person to sell his vote?" sternly demanded the judge. "Ah don' 'xactly un'erstan' yoh, jedge, but ef yoh means yoh ain't buyin' 'em, dat's all right. Ah believe yoh's no politishun nohow." And with this contemptuous parting shot she left the office.

A Pessimist.

"Don't you think it's possible for a couple to get along well on a salary of $25 per week?"

"From what I can learn, it's not possible for a couple to get along well anyhow."